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ABSTRACT

To assist broadcast educators who frequently find themselves short on information when they make arguments for equipment purchases or advocate policies for radio or television labs, a survey was conducted of educators at 278 schools with broadcast programs. Replies were received from 108 educators in radio programs and 112 in television programs. Among the findings were the following: (1) radio students had more than twice as much time available to them per week as the television students; (2) television students had access to open labs approximately 45 minutes per week on the average; (3) less than one-fourth of the respondents had programs that charged lab fees for radio or television courses; (4) the majority of the radio labs were open both days and evenings with less than one-fourth open days only; (5) television labs were not as available as radio labs; (6) the majority of both radio and television programs had either "professionals" such as engineers and technicians, or service contracts to maintain equipment; (7) in radio programs, approximately 40% of the respondents could get equipment repaired the same day; in television, 47% could get same-day service; (8) only 40% of the respondents said equipment was checked daily or weekly; and (9) of the 112 television respondents, 75 replied that they had electronic news gathering equipment. (HOD)

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Choosing Equipment and Setting Policies in Radio and Television Labs

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Broadcast educators frequently find themselves short on information when they make arguments for equipment purchases or advocate policies for radio and/or television labs. In an attempt to gather such information, I surveyed broadcast educators (278 schools with broadcast programs as listed in the Broadcast Education Association's most recent, 1981, survey) concerning equipment and policies in radio and television labs.

The survey was mailed out in June and I received replies from professors in 108 radio programs and 112 television programs.

Table 1 displays the number of students who enroll in radio and television production courses on an average per semester. The table also shows how many total hours per week labs are open, outside of class and/or required lab times. That is, for the student who wants or needs additional time for orientation or completing projects, is such lab time available. The most useful number here is the mean hours available per week per student.

Radio students have more than twice as much time available to them per week as the television students. Notice that some programs have no open lab time at all for students. There was a wide range in the ratios of hours available to students. For example, one program with 100 radio students offered absolutely no open lab time. A more common occurence was many students and few lab hours. For example 450 students and 60 hours or 180 students and 40 hours of lab time weekly. At the other extreme is a program which has 80 students per semester and labs open a total of 1330 hours per week.

Television students have access to open labs approximately 45 minutes per week on average. The range was great in television availability too. For example, one program with 116 students offers open labs 10 hours per week. On the other hand is a program with 15 students and 168 hours/week of open lab. Twelve institutions offer no open lab time to television production students.

Table 1

Open lab hours available to students

	Radio	Television
# students	6,785	7,154
Open lab hrs./week	11,030	4,792
Mean hrs./student	1.6	.7
Range per week	0 hrs to 1330 hrs.	0 hrs. to 336 hrs.

Table 2 shows fees charged for production courses. Less than one/fourth of the respondents have programs which charge lab fees for radio or television courses. Of those which do, the range is great—from $3 to $85 in the radio programs and from $3 to $150 in the television programs. The mean figure is the mean of fees of those which do charge fees.

Table 2

Lab Fees charged for courses

	Radio	Television
Fees charged for course	25 programs	28 programs
Mean fee charged	$21	$30
Range	$3 to $85	$3 to $150

A third question asked, "Are the labs open after 5 p.m.? If yes, when? Are they open weekends? If yes when?" Table 3 shows the replies to those questions.

Table 3

Accessibility of labs

	Audio/Radio	Video/Television
Hours/week labs open		
Days only	25 programs	28 programs
Days and evenings (10pm)	51	40
To midnight	21	8
24 hrs./day	7	8
Weekends	53	36
No open lab	4	12

The majority of the radio labs are open both days and evenings. Adding together those which are open until 10pm, until midnight and 24 hours a day, 79 programs are accessible day and night. Additionally, some of these 79 programs are also open weekends. Less than one fourth are open days only. Surprisingly, there are 4 programs which teach radio production with no open lab time available to students.

Television labs are not as available as radio labs. Fifty-six programs have labs which are open days and nights. Twelve programs offer television production courses with no lab time available outside of class and/or required lab times.

Another question asked, "Who maintains equipment (e.g. civil service engineer, faculty, teaching assistant, etc.)?" Responses to that question are displayed in Table 4.

The majority of both radio and television programs have "professionals" such as engineers, professional technicians or service contracts.

However, nearly one-fourth of the radio programs don't. Further, only 20% of the television programs do not have professionals maintain their equipment. Of those which don't, a wide variety of "others" do the job, ranging from student volunteers, to faculty, to "we all work at it."

Table 4

Who maintains equipment

	Radio	Television
Maintenance		
Engineer	82	93
Other	26	19

A further question asked, "How promptly are emergency breakdowns usually serviced (e.g. same day, next day, next week)?"

Table 5 reveals a great range in the time it takes to get equipment repaired. In radio programs, only approximately 40% can get equipment repaired the same day. In television, 47% can get same-day service. In the "longer" category, there were some who replied that it would take until next semester, and even that it would have to wait until next summer. In the "other" category were several which replied as soon as possible, but did not give any indication of how long that usually is.

Table 5

Breakdowns Serviced

	Radio	Television
Same day	45	53
Next day	22	16
Next week	19	19
Longer	6	5
Other	16	19

Some of the comments reveal even more graphically the variance in the support of programs. One respondent replied that they spend $25,000/year on engineering, repair, spare parts and maintenance, and another $30,000 on equipment replacement. At the other end was a respondent who wrote that the level of support had dropped so low that the program had lost their technician and maintenance funds, and that responding to my survey was his last academic task as he'd just resigned in frustration. Another replied that audio studios were heavily used but "in a sorry state" and television was so expensive that students rarely got to use the equipment.

Table 6 reveals the variety of approaches to preventative maintenance. The questionnaire asked, "Other than emergency breakdowns, how often is equipment checked for maintenance purposes?" The question was asked with regard to production equipment in general. Only approximately 40% said equipment was checked daily or weekly. Nearly one fifth of the respondents said equipment was checked rarely or never. In the "other" category were such replies as "regular service contract" "when needed," "equipment is new," and "through teacher."

Table 6

Equipment checked

Equipment checked	
Daily	15
Weekly	30
Monthly	12
Monthly to semiannually	3
Annually	7
Rarely	12
Never	9
Other	20

Another question asked was, "Who monitors labs--e.g. make appointments, checks out equipment, helps novices with equipment, reports problems, etc.?" When more than one category of personnel was listed, the one listed first was coded. So, for example, while "faculty" was the most common response, the response often was "faculty and T.A." In the "Other" category, were such responses as "secretary," "library," "volunteers," "combination of dozens," "studio manager," "community access director," student employee," and "director of television services." Amazingly, some labs are not monitored at all.

Table 7

Who monitors labs

	Audio/Radio	Video/Television
Monitors labs		
Graduate Ass't.	17	12
Faculty	44	68
Student	23	8
Other	16	19
Not monitored	2	1

Another question asked respondents to check which items of television equipment their labs have. Several respondents noted that all of their television production was done using portable equipment, and that they have no television studios, just a number of editing stations. Many commented enthusiastically that this is the only way to go. Of the 112 television respondents, 75 replied that they have electronic news-gathering equipment, though not all 75 teach using only than equipment.

On the other hand, most production labs do have studios with full

complements of lights, flats, color cameras, switches and character generators. Many have chroma key and special effects generators. Fourteen even have digital video effects.

Also, from comments, I inferred that if one can hook up with a local PBS television station or NPR radio station, you are ahead. Many of those who responded that their labs were open 24 hours a day, seven days a week noted that their lab was actually the PBS or NPR station. Others have associations with cable, community access, commercial television affiliates and so on. These respondents noted that the other equipment their labs had included such things as remote vans and helicopters.

In summary, what prompted me to undertake this survey was that I wanted to effectively argue that the labs where I teach should be kept open evenings and be open on weekends. I decided to survey others and figured that while I was at it I could learn more about what other people do and have in their labs. The results were fascinating. Some comments revealed a happy state, in which a person was teaching with access to very fine facilities. Many have 8 or 10 radio labs, and access to everything in televsion land. Others are teaching in desperation, holding things together with bandaids and shoelaces. Consequently it is difficult to draw conclusions about norms for policies and equipment because the variance is enormous, but this survey does offer some concrete figures about practices and policies in radio and television labs.